

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **TIPS FOR THE MATURE DRIVER**

#### **Making sure you and your vehicle are road ready**

The most important element in safe driving is the driver. To help you make sure that you are the safest driver you can be, take a moment to assess yourself.

As we mature, all of us will experience some decrease in physical capacities – some of us as early as age thirty. It's just a natural part of aging. But it doesn't need to prevent you from driving. You just need to be aware of the changes and how to compensate for them.

#### **Vision**

Vision is the single most important tool that drivers possess. As you mature, your eyes' ability to adjust to low light conditions and to recover from the glare of oncoming headlights can make night driving a challenge

**To counteract any vision deficiencies, here are a few helpful hints:**

- Avoid night driving or driving in heavy rain or fog if at all possible.
- If you must drive at night, remember to avoid looking at oncoming headlights. Instead keep your eyes on the white line at the side of the road when other vehicles are driving towards you.
- Try to drive in the right hand lane whenever possible.
- Keep your windshield and all car windows and mirrors clean.
- Make sure your vehicle has both side and rearview mirrors. Check them often.
- If you are taking any medications, be sure you know all side effects.

#### **Hearing**

Sometimes even slight hearing impairments can cause driving problems because it may lessen your ability to hear things like horns, sirens or train warning signals.

**Tips to help you maximize your hearing ability while driving:**

- Keep the radio off or turned low.
- Keep the air conditioning fans turned low.
- Leave the window open slightly while driving in the city.
- Check with your doctor if you notice signs of hearing loss. He or she may be able to correct the problem.

#### **Mobility**

Keeping fit is the easiest way to avoid or lessen the impact of the aging process on physical mobility.

**Tips for ways to compensate for the unavoidable physical changes that could effect driving skills:**

- Use a vehicle equipped with automatic transmission, power brakes and power steering.
- Wear comfortable clothes and comfortable shoes with non-skid soles while driving.
- Avoid long trips whenever possible.
- If you have difficulty maneuvering sharp turns or making sharp head turns, avoid situations that require you to back up.
- If your car seat is too low, add a seat cushion. Your shoulders should be about level with the top of the steering wheel.

## Reactions and Reflexes

All the factors we've already discussed have a significant impact on your reaction times and your reflexes. It is especially important for the mature driver to be aware of potential limitations and take steps to offset them.

**Here are some general tips to help ensure safe driving:**

- Have your eyes and your hearing checked frequently.
- Know your abilities and limitations.
- Don't drive if you are tired.
- Drive familiar roads and avoid traffic congestion.
- Maintain proper speeds. Remember going too slowly can sometimes be as dangerous as going too fast.
- Stay in the right lane if you are driving slower than other traffic.
- Observing the traffic signs, whether you are just driving to the corner grocery store or you are planning a longer trip, is imperative.

## Handling Diverse Driving Conditions

### • Rural Roads

While rural roads are often less congested than city streets or interstates, they can pose special challenges for any driver.

**Here are just a few potentially dangerous situations to watch out for:**

- "Instant intersections." As you drive, scan both sides of the road, watching for hidden driveways, farm field accesses, etc. which can become "instant intersections."
- Watch for slow moving-vehicles, like farm equipment.
- Avoid passing whenever possible.

### • City Driving

**City driving can be frustrating**, even nerve-racking, but if you observe the traffic rules, signs and signals and keep the following tips in mind, it can be much easier:

- Plan your route ahead of time.
- Watch for pedestrians.
- Be alert for and obey traffic signals.
- Make sure that you are in the correct lane.
- Watch for brake lights.
- Avoid left turns whenever possible.

### • Parking Lots

**Many accidents occur in parking lots, here are a few tips to follow:**

- Pull straight through to a parking spot and park with the nose of the car facing out whenever possible, to avoid backing out.
- Drive in designated lanes only. Never drive across parking spaces.
- Be alert for any vehicles that may suddenly back out of parking spaces.

### • Interstate Driving

Interstate driving is often the most intimidating form of driving for the mature driver. High speeds and multiple lanes, exit and entrance ramps can seem daunting.

**Keeping these guidelines in mind will make interstates look a little friendlier:**

- Always plan your route carefully. Make sure you know the names and locations of all the roads and exits that you will need to take.
- Obey posted speed limits. Remember that you must maintain at least the minimum-posted speed.
- Avoid unnecessary lane changes; stay in the right hand lane, especially if you are moving slower than the rest of the traffic.
- If you are uncomfortable driving at high speeds, try to avoid the interstate whenever possible.

**Remember: Driving too slow can be just as dangerous as going too fast, and you can be ticketed.**

- **Driving in Ice and Snow**

The first rule of driving in ice and snow is, don't!

**However, if you absolutely must drive in these weather conditions:**

- Make absolutely certain that your vehicle is roadworthy before you drive.
- Maintain a greater distance from the car in front of you, so that you'll have plenty of stopping time.
- Remember that bridges, overpasses and exit ramps may be hazardous even when other roads are in good condition.
- If you skid, don't panic, stay calm, and take your foot off of the accelerator pedal. Don't brake, unless it is absolutely necessary and steer gently in the direction that the rear end of the car is skidding.
- Always, wear your seat belt!

- **Rain and Fog**

Again, it's best if you can avoid driving in these conditions.

**But if you can't:**

- Remember that streets are slickest just after a rain begins.
- Turn on your headlights in rain or fog. Don't use high beam lights in fog.
- Lower your speed.
- Watch the taillights of the vehicle ahead, but don't follow too closely.

- **Night**

Night driving can be especially difficult for the mature driver because of changes in vision.

**If you must drive at night, here are some helpful guidelines for safe night driving:**

- Try to stay on familiar streets or roadways.
- Don't look directly into oncoming headlights. Look to the side at the white line on the edge of the road.
- Make an extra effort to scan, not just the road ahead, but both sides of the road.